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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0495
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0420
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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0359
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0160
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000258

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SUBJECT: EAST TIMOR SITREP #2 FOR MAY 24, 2006

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CLASSIFIED BY: Sean Stein, Charge de Affairs, Embassy Dili,
State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) Summary:
GOET REQUESTS INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION
CONTINUED FIGHTING BETWEEN FDTL AND DISSIDENT FORCES
UPDATE ON DISSIDENT LEADERS
POLICE UPDATE
THE SITUATION IN DILI
IDP UPDATE
AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY EVACUATION
End summary.

GOET REQUESTS INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

12. (C) At a meeting with the diplomatic corps this afternoon, President Xanana Gusmao, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, Foreign Minister Ramos Horta and President of Parliament Francisco Guterres, formally request international intervention. A written request was later submitted to the Government of Australia. According to the Australian Embassy, Australia has formally replied in the affirmative but emphasized that additional details need to be worked out. A team is reportedly coming to Dili from Canberra tomorrow to begin those discussions. See septel for details of the request and analysis of implications for the GOET.

CONTINUED FIGHTING BETWEEN FDTL AND DISSIDENT FORCES

13. (C) Active fighting between FDTL and dissident forces commenced around 7:00am in the Tibar / Tasitolu area, immediately west of Dili. Dissident forces who had gathered in the Tibar area overnight then moved to the FDTL base in Tasitolu (a few kilometers closer to Dili) and attacked using small arms. These forces reportedly consisted of members of the various police and special units who had defected at the start of

hostilities as well as members of the so-called petitioner group. Force levels in this engagement were estimated to be 30-40 soldiers from FDTL with naval augmentation (which had to sail in backward after losing the forward gear) against approximately 80-100 dissident forces. As of late this afternoon, it appeared that FDTL has regained some control over the area, although residents of Tibar were still reporting ongoing shooting as of 5:00pm. Accurate casualty figures are not yet available, though early reports are that dissident forces suffered heavy casualties while only one FDTL injury has been confirmed.

¶4. (SBU) Additional skirmishes between FDTL units and yet-to-be-identified forces occurred in the hills overlooking the Taibesse neighborhood of Dili this afternoon. Emboffs heard sporadic gunfire and periodic grenade explosions. These clashes took place near the home of the Commander of FDTL, Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak, and Embassy received several unconfirmed reports of an attack on his house. The fighting reportedly expanded into the Lahane area, near the official residence of President Xanana Gusmao, and resulted in a telephone call from Police Commissioner Paulo Martins to President Gusmao suggesting that the President's life might be in danger. Although the President was not in Lahane when he received the call --- he was meeting with diplomats in his office near downtown Dili --- he was visibly upset, in part because he had not previously been notified of any FDTL operations in Lahane. As of late afternoon, this situation was still developing, but it is currently believed to involve smaller force levels on both sides.

¶5. (U) The situation in the Becora / Fatuahi area, where hostilities were initiated yesterday, has stabilized. In the aftermath of yesterday's fighting, FDTL recovered two vehicles, a motorbike and a cell phone that had been left behind by fleeing dissident forces.

¶6. (U) The nature and size of the dissident forces appears to be

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fluid and it remains difficult to get an accurate profile of numbers and makeup as they are comprised of members of Major Reinado's dissident military police group, Lt. Salsinha's dismissed petitioner group, recently defected members of specialized police units, and a mix of other supporters.

UPDATE ON DISSIDENT LEADERS

¶7. (C) Embassy staff spoke to Lt. Salsinha late afternoon today. Salsinha stated that he was still in Ermera district but has moved into the mountains further away from Dili. He reported that he is currently standing by and waiting to hear from Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta regarding the commencement of dialogue between the GOET and the petitioners. He denied that any of his men were moving toward Dili. (Note: Embassy has several credible reports of petitioner involvement in the current fighting as well as of some petitioners traveling toward Dili this afternoon. End note.)

¶8. (C) In conversations with several sources this afternoon, Major Reinado was reported to be in an upbeat and confident mood. He stated that the FDTL had attacked the police station in Tasitolu this morning and that his group therefore had to respond. He emphasized that his main goal remains the reform of the FDTL. When asked about the prospect of international intervention, he responded that he would be "willing to establish peace" but would never surrender to international forces, only to President Xanana Gusmao. He repeated that he wants Gusmao to use his powers as President and Commander in Chief to dissolve the government.

¶9. (C) Major Marcos Tilman was reportedly involved in the attack on the Tasitolu military headquarters earlier today.

POLICE UPDATE

¶10. (C) Emboff visited the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) compound today to ascertain the level of police still on duty in this unit. The compound was notably less busy than usual, with approximately 35 total officers seen during the lunchtime visit when the compound is normally full and active. The UIR commander was not present. An inspector initially stated that all UIR officers were accounted for and at their usual duty posts, but later admitted that at least seven had deserted. Embassy information indicates a far larger defection rate, but apparent attempts to hide the scale of the problem makes assessing the exact level of police defection difficult. Police Commissioner Martins has remained in sporadic contact with police headquarters but has reportedly gone into hiding. Police and UN reports indicate that the Deputy Police Commissioner has most likely joined Maj. Reinado's group in Aileu.

THE SITUATION IN DILI

¶11. (U) The atmosphere around the city was notably tenser during the day, although in central Dili there were still many signs of normal life. The widespread panic and exodus that seized the city in the aftermath of the April 28 riots does not appear to be repeating itself. However, exodus out of the city is at this point impossible due to ongoing clashes and roadblocks on the main roads out. International flights out of East Timor continued to have several dozen empty seats, although these numbers are decreasing.

¶12. (U) Among the most worrying developments within the city is the increasing level of intimidation and violence carried out by groups of young men, often armed with machetes or sticks, against either westerners (loro mono) or easterners (lorosa'e). On the road out of the city toward Tasitolu and Tibar, a group of about 50 young men, accompanied by several police, were stopping all traffic and were seen attacking a woman who attempted to pass in a taxi. Near the central market, emboffs witnessed another group armed with sticks, machetes, and slingshots chase out the merchants and shoppers. Sporadic gunfire was heard throughout the day to the south, east and west of the city.

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IDP UPDATE

¶13. (U) The number of people seeking shelter in Dili's internally displaced persons (IDP) camps has increased significantly over the last day or so. While most IDPs are going to the larger well-known camps, new camps have also been established. International NGOs providing aid to the camps estimated as of late this afternoon that there are now about 20,000 IDPs in Dili, located in up to 26 different sites. The larger sites are struggling with overcrowding and deteriorating health and sanitation conditions. Camp organizers are attempting to move some of the IDPs to alternate sites to lessen the resource strain. As of now, security arrangements at the larger camps appear to be under control with security personnel providing adequate screening of entrants.

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY EVACUATION

¶14. (C) According to the Australian Embassy, the Australian military will send tomorrow a C-130 to evacuate dependents, volunteers, and non-essential personnel.

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